

Cleveland Classical Guitar Society: Zidur Guitar Duo (Feb. 24)

by Kevin McLaughlin



Hermelindo Ruiz and Samuel Diz, constituents of the Zidur Guitar Duo, made their Cleveland debut on Saturday, February 24, endearing themselves to the crowd at the Maltz Performing Arts Center with an attractive program and winning personalities — two young

virtuosos from out of town you'd like to meet afterwards over tapas and beer.

Ruiz, a native Puerto Rican, and Diz, Spanish-born, delighted in sharing music from their respective countries, including works by Egúrbida, Gottschalk, Rodrigo, Vide, and Acosta, plus two by Ruiz himself. While other guitarists might have been inclined to flashier repertoire, Ruiz and Diz chose milder stuff, perhaps ambassadors of a gentler sort.

The opening work, Leonardo Egúrbida's *Los Dos Amigos*, established both palette and pattern. It had the two friends trading genial melodies, not as competitors but as co-creators of enjoyment. The fragrance of Puerto Rican country air seemed to waft over the auditorium in this leisurely interpretation.

Souvenir de Porto Rico is a solo piano work by American composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk, based on a Christmas folk song he may have heard on a Puerto Rican excursion in 1859. The arrangement by Ruiz for two guitars worked extremely well, the texture suggesting a larger ensemble — maybe a salon or street band — more exuberant than the original. As was the case all evening, there was a controlled synchronicity between the players — tempos restrained, syncopated rhythms precise, and dynamics on the soft side.

In January 1924, the Spanish composer María Rodrigo Bellido (1888-1967) finished *Coplas de España* in Madrid, and a hundred years later Diz arranged it for the duo. Warm

tone from both guitarists supplied sweetness to the song, but attention to articulation and rhythm provided its beating Flamenco heart.

Violetas by José Fernández Vide, three waltzes with an intro and a coda, were pretty, nostalgic, and unfamiliar, and thus a welcome inclusion on the program. It was about at this point that the listener understood that this was not a concert about guitar prowess but of sharing music with friends. Sometimes melodic lines weren't heard — probably from trying to play too softly — though it's hard to fault the players for taking the risk.

The eponymously titled *Zidur* (a backward spelling of the two guitarist's surnames combined) was one of Ruiz's two original compositions on the program. The interweaving of melodies and Latin-influenced rhythm showed mastery on the part of the composer, as well as an ability to update the duet genre. Such a piece invites repeat performances, and not just by the composer — may it gain broad acceptance as a standard recital work.

Diz turned out to be a bit of a ham with the microphone. Before getting on with the second of the *Three Puerto Rican Dances*, he elaborated on a trip he took with Ruiz to his family home in Puerto Rico — “in the middle of a forest, very dark,” he said. Maybe the detail of the chirping frogs — and his imitation of them — wasn't strictly necessary to understand Acosta's music, but it was awfully charming, and it brought the audience closer to the performers. His magnificent coiffure didn't hurt either, fun to watch during bows and at moments of musical fervor.



The program concluded with its most arresting work: Ruiz's *Concerto to San Telmo*, which saw the pair backed by members of the excellent Opus 216 (violinists Ariel Karas and Victor Beyens, violist Brian Slawta, cellist Trevor Kazarian, and percussionist Dylan Moffitt). Storms at sea, sailors at war, and the picturesque bridges of San Juan are all present in Ruiz's tribute to the venerated Saint Elmo who, like the soloists, has connections to both Spain and Puerto Rico. A little creepiness seeped in by way of tremolos from the strings, and Moffitt startled everyone with loud thunder volleys at unanticipated times. Plucked heartbeats from the soloists got right to the expressive heart of the matter.

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